



## **Hill staffers say lack of urgency plaguing Perkins reauthorization**

March 7, 2006 – Although the reauthorization of the Carl D. Perkins act should get under way in earnest sometime this year, what has stymied the process is a lack of urgency on the part of legislators, and not because of policy differences between bills passed by the House and Senate, according to a panel of congressional staff. The panel, presenting at the Association for Career and Technical Education's National Policy Seminar on March 7 in Washington, D.C., said supporters of career and technical education (CTE) need to increase their lobbying efforts in order to keep Perkins funding intact during appropriations, and also to get legislators to jumpstart the reauthorization.

"We need to be thinking about ways to move that forward," said Denise Forte, a minority staff legislative associate on the House Education and the Workforce Committee.

Forte said she is confident that the threat of zeroing out Perkins altogether will be averted, like it has been in years past. She added, though, that constituents should not become complacent because funding is tight and programs get axed all the time. There is bipartisan support for Perkins in both the House and the Senate. Just last week, House Appropriations Committee member Rep. Ralph Regula (R-Ohio) – who will have much influence over education funding decisions – said that he supports Perkins and will not see it scrapped.

So far, both the House and Senate have passed bills to reauthorize Perkins – H.R. 366 and S.250, respectively. There are a number of similarities between the two bills. They seek to strengthen accountability, with states and local programs being required to make "continuous and substantial" improvement in both the academic and technical skills achievement of students. The bills also promote an emphasis on academics by aligning student academic achievement standards in Perkins with No Child Left Behind. They require that states use funds to link programming and support partnerships between secondary and postsecondary institutions. To enhance these efforts, H.R. 366 would require states to develop sequences of courses for CTE programming that incorporate both secondary and postsecondary elements, and include challenging academic and CTE content that lead to a degree or other credential. S. 250, meanwhile, would require the development of "career pathways."

"I don't think the policy differences are there. I think it's the will to get things done," Forte said.

But when the Perkins reauthorization process begins moving forward again, legislators will have to iron out some differences between S.250 and H.R. 366. Both bills seek to improve student performance by strengthening local accountability, giving new administrative (and programmatic) responsibilities to state agencies. But H.R. 366 proposes a reduction in state administrative funds from 5 percent to 2 percent, a 60 percent cut in funds that states would have available for administrative responsibilities such as developing state plans; reviewing local plans; monitoring and evaluating program effectiveness; and assuring that

states comply with all federal laws. Another issue to be hashed out by legislators is the future of the Tech Prep funding stream. While S.250 maintains a separate funding stream for Tech Prep, H.R. 366 would roll it into the main state grants. CTE advocates argue that if the two streams are combined, this could result in a funding loss for Tech Prep and for CTE programs overall.

The Administration, business community, legislators and education advocates have been focused on the dropout issue, increasing the math and science competitiveness of American students, and developing a skilled workforce. Forte said as the reauthorization process moves forward, CTE constituents need to demonstrate how Perkins fits into this framework of improving student outcomes. More and more CTE programs are combining CTE and academics to engage students by showing them the correlation between what is learned in the classroom and work, she noted. In math and science, students are applying this academic content in real-world contexts as a result of increased team-teaching between academic and CTE teachers. And it is undeniable that career-tech is integral in helping to develop a skilled workforce, Forte said.

Scott Fleming, senior education policy advisor for the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, said that once the reauthorization process is complete, it would send "an important message, and hopefully, funding for Perkins will never be an issue again."